Homes for All Pets Workshop – July 25, 2015

Reporting Back to the Community

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Several hundred pet lovers, county staff, elected officials, civic leaders, veterinarians, foster & rescue groups and concerned citizens came together in July 2015 to find solutions to issues impacting animal well-being in Miami-Dade County.

The Homes for All Pets Workshop produced a number of thoughtful, actionable suggestions for improving the state of our animals in Miami-Dade. Drawing on successes to date in our community, through the county as well as volunteer efforts, and a number of best practices nationally and internationally, the collective wisdom in the room pointed at several recurring themes.

Below, we compile the broad recommendations in more detail, including: the need for increased funding for the Animal Services Department (ASD), the need to increase low-cost/free spay & neutering services, increasing Trap-Neuter-Release Programs (TNRs), increasing the availability of veterinary services for low-income pet owners, the need for more robust public education on pet retention, tighter laws and better enforcement around animal safety, education, community outreach, and more transparency at the ASD.

We hope that this draft report captures the momentum produced by our community and helps

lead the way for more informed public policy, more civic engagement and volunteerism around animal issues, and more responsiveness from our elected officials. We are so very grateful to those who attended and contribute so generously to this critical effort.

By way of refresher, during the first session, participants responded to the following question:

What are the top three approaches/programs that have been most effective in addressing animal safety in Miami-Dade the past three years that we should continue and/or increase? What other approaches/programs proven in other places can be most effective in addressing animal safety in Miami-Dade that we have not yet implemented?

I. <u>Saving Animals</u>: *"Shelters are not pet resorts – they are last resorts for pets."*

   i. <u>Reduce the Pet Population and Increase Adoptions</u>: *"Adopt Don't Shop."*

- Increase spay and neutering services throughout Miami-Dade
- Improve access to appointment for spay/neuter services
- Make it "cool" to adopt
- Provide outreach and transportation to low-income pet owners for spay/neuter services
- Increase funding for all services, especially spaying and neutering
- Offer clinics providing low-cost services
- Offer spay/neuter services in underserved areas
- Continue/increase free sterilization services for dogs and cats
- Explore a mandatory sterilization program
- Make provisions for pet retention services, including low cost veterinary services
- Promote animal programs in churches and schools
- Increase collaboration with South Florida Veterinarian Foundation
- Provide additional mobile TNR units
- Improve website for the Animal Services Department (ASD) regarding help for animals
- Promote the benefits of TNR to the public
- Improve the 311 service as it relates to animals – it is not working well now
- Allow pets on buses and public transportation generally
- Ban puppy sales in pet stores
- Bolster pet retention and deferred pet programs
- Create a safe place to temporarily leave pets for low-income folks

   ii. <u>Proposed Plans that Offer Solutions</u>: *"Until there are none – adopt at least one."*

- Promote education and public awareness through early education, public service announcements, radio and social media
- Provide comprehensive TNR programs for cities provided by Miami-Dade
- Offer grooming at the shelter
- Engage Red Rover TNR program
- Offer school field trips to the shelter to educate children on responsible pet ownership

- Increase funding for veterinarians generally, and to provide free and low-cost services
- Seek celebrity endorsements and testimonials
- Partner with sports teams to broaden the audience and raise public awareness
- Provide pet food and preventable medicines (heartworm, flea and tick) for low-income folks
- Promote planned "Pethood"
- Create a county wide Animal Club to help animals – promote community service
- Explore the use of tag fee to help bolster animal services and make it more sustainable
- Embrace ways to encourage pet retention & deferment
- Promote ways to keep your pet on a budget – Chicago example: distributed flyers
- Promote microchipping
- Demonstrate consequences of not spaying/neutering in public education campaign
- Engage Businesses featuring adoptable pets i.e. Ikea, Target
- Partner with municipalities for TNR, adoptions and other programs

iii. Transports, Rescues, Fosters and Other Programs: *"Want a breed? They are all at a rescue."*

- Create an ordinance penalizing landlords who don't allow pets (especially large dogs) and incentives for landlords who do allow pets
- Increase transports
- Pets for Life – ask The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) to become a Pets for Life Community -pet partnership program
- Increase rescues
- Expand partnerships with TNR groups
- Provide more financial support for rescues – increase Support Urgent Needs (SUN) program
- Contract the Red Rover TNR program
- Coordinate networking between rescue groups – hold regular meetings with ASD
- Create a wide-ranging lost and found program

iv. Partnership with South Florida Veterinarian Foundation:

- Garner more funds for rescues, including funds for medical issues
- Secure additional funds for vets and low-income people for pet medical services
- Establish more clinics which provide low-cost vet services
- Contract with vets to provide medical services to low-income pet owners
- Provide low-cost teeth cleaning, extractions

II. Animal Safety: *"Pets are family."*
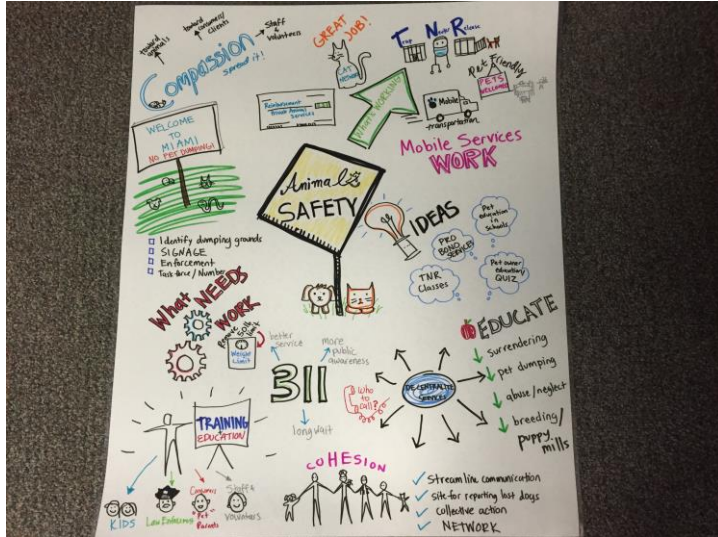
Animal Safety Graphic Art by Gina Ha visually summarizes ideas

v. Neglect and Cruelty - Strengthening Laws: *"Don't breed or buy while shelter pets die."*

- Create stricter laws with stiffer fines around animal abuse and/or neglect are important
- Establish better overall enforcement of laws regarding animals
- Modify Policies– i.e. quicker response time, allow feeding animals in parks
- Tighten laws around animal care and animal breeding
- Establish a neuter law – same time as rabies vaccine
- Hire more animal investigators and animal control officers to help with enforcement
- Disseminate information about the current laws concerning caring for animals and animal breeding
- Propose stronger laws for roadside puppy market
- Eliminate breed specific laws
- Establish a Registry of folks "do not allow to adopt" list
- Launch a volunteer pet patrol – needs some teeth, actual enforcement of laws
- Eliminate laws against feeding cats in parks
- Hire more staff to enforce laws
- Issue fewer warnings – give more citations
- Provide better training for law enforcement, police
- Modify laws regarding housing to allow dogs –especially where public funds are involved
- Hire Public Service Aides for ASD
- Focus not just on punishment to enforce these norms, but also incentives, such as rewarding homeowners who will rent to pet owners
- Explore allowing pets in public housing

vi. Pet Training: Socialization and Behavior Modification: *"Adoption is the only option."*

- Ensure that animals in the shelter are walked regularly
- Employ an animal behaviorist who trains the trainers
- Provide more dog parks
- Work with difficult animals (Tampa Bay model)
- Provide additional help for fosters and rescues with behavior issues

The second question participants were called to respond to was: *What information is the most important to get out to the public but is not currently being communicated? What do you feel is the most effective way to reach the public, and what should that message be?*

Visualization of community engagement around our pets

III. Education and Community Outreach: *"Animals are like us. We need them."*

vii. Media Campaign and Marketing: *"Real men neuter their dogs."*

- Produce a true public service campaign with a real marketing/branding component; the campaign should include T.V., Radio, Billboards, Social Media, and a K-12 classroom component
- Create a better website for the ASD, especially with regard to help for animals
- Generate trilingual PSAs (English, Spanish and Creole)
- Highlight pet issues on cultural programs
- Increase visibility for the ASD (public transportation, libraries, museums, MIA, Seaport, etc…)
- Increase promotions for all the spay/neuter programs currently available
- Increase PSAs
- Increase marketing of existing programs – targeted marketing
- Provide signage regarding strays, abuse – "If you see a stray animal, call 1-800…"

- Create a County pet mascot
- Branding – eliminating the misconception of shelter animals
- Target spay/neuter campaign to men

viii. <u>Shelter</u> Improvements:

General

- Increase transparency at the shelter; more accurate reporting and greater accountability are paramount to establishing trust between the ASD and the broader community
- Increase overall funding
- Install cameras in the shelter
- Provide information on the many positive services being provided by the ASD and the positive advancements being made by ASD to save animals
- Inform the public that there are alternatives to dumping their unwanted animals. They can easily surrender their animals at the Animal Shelter
- Ask community for input for the new facility
- Consider an X-ray machine for the shelter
- Increase mobile spay/neuter mobile clinics which handle dogs over 50 pounds
- Create an Oversight and Advisory board for ASD
- Conduct Third party audits regularly

Shelter Staffing:

- Follow-up on pet adoptions
- Increase staffing for the ASD, especially investigators and staff who do community outreach
- Contract trainers to evaluate dogs – provide training
- Require strays picked up by the ASD be fixed before returning to owner
- Bathe and groom dogs before they are adopted out – especially before they are fixed
- Increase the animal adoption counselors to provide guidance for folks adopting animals
- Improve training and oversight for shelter staff – need culture shift away from job protection
- Ensure quicker response for injured strays – provide critical care to save animals
- Increase funding for staffing and volunteer training
- Provide improved volunteer recruitment and management (motivation & praise)
- Work with code enforcement to identify violations

Shelter Programming: "Prevent death, prevent birth."

- Expand and increase the educational programs at the ASD
- Promote awareness of resources to help stray animals; e.g. 311, as well as rescue organizations
- The ASD needs their own dedicated hotline to better inform and respond to the public

- Provide gifts for spay/neuter in low-income areas (incentives – gift card for free dog food or pet supplies)
- Increase marketing of existing programs and targeted marketing to specific groups
- Hold fundraisers at the new shelter and other events to get the public into the space
- Contract groomers to help make animals presentable for adoptions
- Improve the website for the ASD, especially regarding help for animals (including stray and abused animals)
- Incorporate photo recognition for repeat adopters to ensure they don't continue adopting
- Increase resources, funding to enhance volunteers, fosters and other programs
- Be more welcoming of volunteers at the shelter
- Provide doggy starter kits to support people who adopt dogs
- Emulate best practices from other cities, countries
- Provide promotional coupons for those who adopt shelter pets
- Modify Project PetSnip; currently, there are too many restrictions for vets
- Include local parks in TNR program
- Create special task force to assess animal needs
- Partner with municipalities for TNR, adoptions and other programs
- Centralize resources generally for animal services and support, both county and volunteer
- Promote cultural sensitivity and education; not everyone thinks about animals the same way

ix. <u>Working with Schools:</u>   *"Animals are like us. We need them."*

- Work in conjunction with the School Board to change children's attitude/behavior towards animals; message should be "Animals are Like Us. We Need Them."
- Provide a hotline number in schools to report animals abuse
- Reduce the age for high school volunteers at shelter to 15
- Include bus pass to shelter for high school students who volunteer
- Place posters in school regarding abused or neglected animals with hotline number
- Install signage regarding strays – if you see a stray animal, call 1-800…
- Encourage field trips to the shelter for all 6th graders
- Hold an Adoption slogan contest
- Include Humane education in curriculum - pilot to figure out what works best in schools and integrate it as a part of early education just as anti-littering campaigns are part of the curriculum
- Increase education about cats, particularly
- Work with the Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs)

x. <u>Volunteers:</u>

- Increase networking for volunteers
- Involve volunteers to help match pets with adopters
- Provide additional guidance for people adopting
- Increase outreach to different organizations to encourage fostering

- Provide improved and additional training for volunteers
- Promote and increase programs that engage the elderly
- Engage young professionals
- Piggyback onto successful events – i.e. Adopt A Tree